Agnes Blome, Wolfgang Keck and Jens Alber (eds.) (2009), *Family and the Welfare State in Europe: Intergenerational Relations in Ageing Societies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. £79.95, pp. 341, hbk.

ANTONIS ROUMPAKIS

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the effect of reproducing existing social norms and hierarchies rather than challenging them or providing alternatives.

There are weaknesses in the book which are mainly to do with length and editing – this book reads like a Ph.D. thesis rather than a slick or streamlined presentation in several places. Stricter editing would have prevented some *longeurs* in the middle of the book in which too much verbatim material is reproduced and too many themes and subheadings created to no great overall effect. More analysis could be made of the differences between Christian- and Muslim-based religious welfare providers for example, and the new typology of welfare model proposed – that of 'social ethics-welfare particularism'– is not readily user friendly or comprehensible.

But these weaknesses should not detract from the important achievements of this timely book which breaks new ground in analysing and typologising the importance of religious-based welfare. This source of welfare can no longer be ignored by the more secular side of social scientific engagement in social welfare, human development and nation building. This book is an original, competent and credible contribution as seen through the 'lens' of religious identity and spiritual belief. It offers a compelling and full analysis of the state of social welfare in Lebanon, certain elements of which reflect the Middle East as a whole, clearly showing the challenges that lie ahead, but also offering strategic ways forward. It also offers tantalising frameworks for interpreting the growing role and contribution of the religious sector in so-called 'developed' democracies and such as the UK and Europe. More inter-cultural and inter-continental research inspired by the aspirations and methodologies of this book will, I hope, take place in the future.

CHRIS BAKER
University of Chester

Agnes Blome, Wolfgang Keck and Jens Alber (eds.) (2009), *Family and the Welfare State in Europe: Intergenerational Relations in Ageing Societies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. £79.95, pp. 341, hbk.
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This publication is the outcome of a research project at the Social Science Research Centre Berlin (WZB). The book is a comprehensive study on family policies and explores intergenerational relations in ageing societies. The primary aim of this book is to place Germany within a comparative European social policy perspective. The authors follow the literature on ageing, welfare and care regimes and in particular the process of 'defamilialization', where family members are relieved of their care obligations and 'refamilialization', where care obligations are given back to the family. The researchers place their theoretical exploration on the context of four ageing societies (Germany, Sweden, Italy, France) and set four research questions. First, how welfare states shape the living conditions of old and young age groups. Second, the exchange relations among family members (care services, monetary transfers, etc.). The third puts the institutionalist argument, whether public provision complements (crowding in) or antagonises (crowding out) the role of the family, to test. The fourth looks for any empirical evidence of intergenerational conflict.

The authors' decision to combine both institutional analysis at the macro-level as well as micro-level analysis of household attitudes towards pensions, care for older people, transfer payment for families and childcare, provide one of the most thorough examinations of the recent developments on family policies. This research compares four welfare systems, time and age groups. The macro analysis follows a 'comparative static' approach (Hay, 2001) where the

authors compare the key policies in 1990 with those of 2004. Due to the lack of sufficient data, the micro analyses are applied for selected years after 2000.

Comparing the recent pension reforms, the authors identify several commonalities across all four cases such as lower generosity of public benefits (changes in indexation, eligibility rules, longer contribution years) and essentially the weakening of their redistributive character. The authors rightly argue that the recent reforms put more pressure on current workers since they will save with more unfavourable terms than their parents. The comparative static approach applied for this research shows clearly the differences between 1990 and 2004, but remains unable to explain the process of (institutional) change and why we ended up with solutions such as privatisation and funded schemes.

The comparison of pensioners' living conditions provides an excellent example why expenditure alone or even perhaps macro-approaches are not able to adequately capture social reality. Particularly in the case of Italy, a 'pension-heavy' welfare system, the authors show that pension benefits cover approximately 70 per cent of household income – the lowest percentage among the four countries – thus challenging the expectation that Italian pensioners enjoy particularly generous retirement.

Exploring the care arrangements for the elderly across the four welfare systems, the authors identify that in Germany, and to a minor degree in France, the state has assumed a greater role in providing and financing care. Particularly in Germany, the introduction of a statutory long-term insurance fund extended the number of recipients and relaxed the responsibility from the families (defamilialization). On the other hand, in Sweden the eligibility rules to receive professional care for the elderly were tightened and family members were given the option to receive reward for their caring (implicit refamilialization). The authors strongly argue that the process of 'defamilialization' is not crowding out the family and in particular the emotional closeness of family members, although geographical proximity might affect the frequency of contacts.

For Italy, the authors were not able to identify any significant changes in care arrangements for the elderly, at least not formal ones. Surprisingly, the authors do not discuss the role of migrant workers that continue to be extensively involved in elderly care as a low-cost solution to meet the increasing demand for care services (Bettio *et al.*, 2006).

Comparing the policies for transferring income to families, the authors show that lone-parents face the highest risks of poverty in all four counties. However, after post-transfers, the risk is minimised in Sweden, remains moderate in Germany and France and is high in Italy. In particular, Germany is the only country that has increased its income-tested child allowance and now offers households the choice between childcare benefit and tax breaks for low- and middle-income groups, respectively. The authors suggest that there is a gradual convergence of Germany with the already generous levels of child allowance in Sweden and France, while in Italy child allowance remains linked with parents' performance in the (official) labour market.

In this way, the authors suggest that Germany is far from a 'frozen landscape' and there have been policy areas where the welfare state has expanded its services (table 10.3). While in other areas (i.e. pensions) the role of public programmes weakened, these cutbacks are common for all countries. However, these trends are inexorably linked to the 'productivist argument' put forward originally by Esping-Andersen (2002) and later adopted in the Lisbon targets, among others to increase female employment rates. The means that have been realised to meet these targets are the extension of childcare facilities and parental leave that allow women to reconcile 'work–life balance'. The authors could have discussed more the recent trends in welfare state development and how the latter expands on policy areas that are linked with productivity enhancement (including pension eligibility rules) but impose serious cutbacks to unproductive age groups (i.e. pensioners).

Overall the book offers a genuine and innovative research direction that explores the 'black box' of intergenerational relations and in particular how institutions mediate families ability to offer financial resources as well as provide care services to their members. The concluding finding of this research is that there is not any empirical evidence of intergenerational conflict but more cross-national variation in citizens' expectations. In summary, institutional legacies remain important and national welfare institutions provide different solutions that either meet (e.g. Germany) or neglect (e.g. Italy) the increasing pressures for families to reconcile work and care arrangements across Europe.

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ANTONIS ROUMPAKIS
University of Bath

Martin Evans and Lewis Williams (2009), *A Generation of Change, a Lifetime of Difference: Social Policy in Britain since 1979*. Bristol: Policy Press. £24.99, pp. 337, pbk.
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In their book on social policy in Britain since 1979, Evans and Williams choose to focus on the rules and outcomes of policies rather than provide another 'deconstruction of discourse'. Their emphasis is upon income-related policy – tax, social security and occupational welfare. Inevitably, this takes them into aspects of other policy areas such as housing and education, but their concerns here remain confined to income-related issues such as housing benefit, educational maintenance allowance and student loans.

The authors want to move beyond a tendency of both policy and analysis to compartmentalise our lives into artificial segments, and instead seek to provide a comparative 'cradle to grave' analysis with a whole lifetime approach. Comparisons between different welfare regimes are made by asking the question: 'What would the outcomes have been if the policies in place at this particular point in time had stayed still?' The particular points in time that they have chosen are 1979 (representing 'Old Labour'), 1997 (for the 'New Right') and 2008 (for 'New Labour'). Their simple question masks a number of complex methodological issues.

Evans and Williams base their comparative analysis upon a consideration of three hypothetical family types: the Meades (with median income), the Lowes (with income of less than 50 per cent of the median) and the Moores (with income of two times the median). At times they extend their analysis by reference to two other family types – the Nunns and the Evans-Moores. To enable their comparisons to highlight differences in the policy regimes, they need consistency in their family types, which inevitably means that they are unable to consider the ways that policies interact with the social diversity that characterises a real life population.

The first part of their book sets the scene for their substantive analysis. Chapter 2 provides an overview of UK policy changes since the 1970s, within the context of the formation of the post world war welfare state in the 1940s. It is followed by a chapter on economic and demographic change over the 30-year period.

The second part of the book provides a comparative overview of the impact of tax and benefit policies upon key life stages for the three family types. A chapter on childhood presents income profiles which show that families on benefits fared best in 2008 and worst in 1979,